

Cultural Conceptualisations of Animal Names: A Semantics Perspective

Ijeoma Paulette Ezuruike, Ph.D

Bayero University, Kano

pauletteajay78@gmail.com

Abstract

Animal words have gradually and unconsciously become part of everyday language especially in describing people's characteristics, attitudes and behaviours, and this has got an established connotative meaning in all human languages. Several animals are conceptualised in the minds of language users as a result of their linguistic and cultural experiences and these created schemas are linguistically translated through sense reference thus, producing language which is metaphorically structured. Animal names do not mean the same to all cultures; some share a meaning, while others vary in the meanings they give to a given animal. This study has revealed that the connotative meaning of some animal names are shared by some languages, whereas the conceptual meaning some of the animal names vary among languages because of the differences in their culture, geographical environment, convention, occupation and religion. This difference in conceptual meaning raises a linguistic problem among users of English who come from different linguistic background. Using Sapir-Whorf's (1956) Linguistic Relativity as the framework, this study has discovered that although some animal names share similar meanings among various languages in Nigeria, the meanings some animals connote in one Nigerian language differ from that of other Nigerian languages. This study used questionnaires, interviews as well as oral and written texts to examine the different connotative meanings of animals.

Keywords: *Animal word; Concept; Culture; Thought*

Introduction

Language is the only source of interaction among people (Eggins, 2004). Most of our daily activities require language, and in a contemporary society, human beings react to and produce bits of languages that make sense to them. This means that people interact, not to exchange words and sentences, but to make sense of the world around them. This describes that the overall purpose of language is semantic (Eggins, 2004:11). Since the purpose of language is to make meaning, language users, in the bid to meaningfully express their intents, use different tools to translate abstract ideas, concepts, thoughts, feelings, events and situations into meaningful language. One of these tools employed by language users to translate abstract entities into concrete language is the conceptual tool.

Conceptual development is a process of early word acquisition. In the course of acquiring a new word, the child has to identify a conceptual unit and a linguistic element, and establish a mapping between them (Arunachalam and Waxman, 2010:1). And to further establish a successful learning of the novel linguistic item, the user should be able to systematically extend or transfer the new word beyond the original situation of learning. This language acquisition systematic process of conceptual development however is extended to adults language use since this conceptual knowledge is stored in the human memory (Budson and Price, 2005). The conceptual knowledge which Lakoff and Johnson (2003) also called Conceptual System forms an integral part of human thoughts and actions, which we are unaware of, yet it controls our language and governs our everyday functioning (pp.3). Language users describe the world using their mental representation of categories of things in the world (see Whorf, 1956) – relating one concept to another, and transferring the features of one concept to describe another concept.

Metaphor is one of the tools used to conceptualise human experiences. This conceptualisation is not random, but is systematically structured to form coherent expressions and meanings. People, in the bid to describe difficult situations, behaviours, attitudes, events, processes, ideas, perceptions and experiences draw meaning from their conceptual system which is largely metaphorical (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003:1, 4). This is to say that in using metaphor in everyday language, speakers understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another. Animals for example, are used by language users irrespective of culture to describe people, their behaviours, attitudes, activities and personalities. Human beings and animals are different kinds of beings, yet human beings and their activities are partially structured, understood and talked about in terms of animals.

This kind of structuring is prevalent in all human societies, and is reflected in their proverbs, idioms, folktales and everyday language; however, some users are hardly conscious of the metaphorical mapping entailed in their day-to-day activities since it is not just part of their everyday expression, but their thought. More so, since culture shapes the language of people, it is imminent that the conceptual system of a group of language users will differ from other users in another linguistic group in terms of metaphorical structuring.

Hence, people conceptualise human activities – attitudes and behaviours – using different concepts created from their experiences of the animals around them. It therefore means that in Society A, for example, if the concept of DONKEY is grounded to reflect STUPIDITY, it will be inappropriate and also result to wrong mapping for the language users in such a society to use DONKEY to talk about someone who is STRONG and AGILE as it is conceptualised in Society B. In the bid to find out the meanings different cultures associate with different animal names, this study examines only the three major languages in Nigeria. This paper therefore seeks to find out the meaning(s) associated to different animals in terms of human behaviour and attitudes in Nigerian usage, and identify the differences in their connotative meaning(s) in the three major Nigerian languages⁴.

Other Works on Connotative Meanings of Animal words

Yan-hua (2010) compared English and Chinese connotative meanings of animal words, and it revealed that these western and eastern cultures have some similarities (as well as differences) in the meanings animal words connote, even though there are great differences in their cultural backgrounds and thinking modes. Similarly, Anjomshoa and Sadighi (2015) compared the connotative meaning in animal words between English and Persian expressions. In the study, they discovered that some animal words in Persian and English are the same in cultural connotations. This is because Iranian and the English people have some similarities of thought, some same laws of cognition, and some animals have the same important role in the human life of these two nations, and have the same attributes and features, whereas some of them are dissimilar or different. However, the study identified some differences in the conceptual meaning of animal words between English and Persian. It showed that such dissimilarity is as a result of differences in religion, history, geographical environment, and customs among the English people and the Iranian people.

Furthermore, Fraser (1981) examined insulting animal expressions in different languages other than English to see if they have equal usages, while Newmark (1988) believes that animal metaphors are used to a great extent in order to describe inferior or undesirable human habits and attributes. Davies and Bentahila (1989) examined animal terms in British English and Moroccan Arabic by using different theories like similarity and relevance to categorize animal metaphors. Holmes (1992 as cited in Hsieh 2006) gives examples of the chicken metaphor in her sociolinguistic analysis of sexism in language. Similarly, Sutton (1995; cited in Hsieh 2006) studies linguistic discrimination against females and makes a strong argument about the metaphor "women are animals".

On the other hand, Tomita (2000) works on a large amount of rhetorical expressions such as animal similes and metaphors which are used to delineate the physical appearances or distinctive personalities of various characters in Charles Dickens's novels. Nadim (2000) examines animal roles in Shirazi proverbs with an approach to sociolinguistics. After analysing about 100 animal expressions, he concludes that donkey expressions are the most frequent ones and have some salient semantic molecules such "crazy, worthless, and absurd". Hsieh (2001 cited in Hsieh 2006) studies animal expressions in Mandarin Chinese and German based on Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphors (1980). Hsieh (2004 cited in Hsieh 2006) further proposes that animal expressions are our vocabulary of values.

Finally, Hsieh (2006) investigates animal expressions in Mandarin Chinese and German. With a focus on cat and tiger expressions, he reveals the salient semantic molecules of these animals in both languages. In another study Hsieh (2008) compares animal and plant metaphors to show the semantic autonomy of language and the cognitive level of using these metaphors in the light of lay views vs. scientific theories (Kövecses, 2000 as cited in Hsieh 2008) and verbal processes (Halliday, 1985 as cited in Hsieh 2008). He found that (1) metaphors are not scientific; (2) but the essence of metaphors and nature seems to overlap: in the natural world, animals are moving creatures while plants are motionless life forms; (3) in human languages, animal metaphors are active expressions whereas plant metaphors are static (Anjomshoa and Sadighi, 2015:2). Estaji and Nakhavali (2011) Studied Semantic Derogation in Persian Animal Proverbs. Their analysis shows that sex and semantic derogation are not shown in Persian structures and proverbs as much as other languages, but in the cases with semantic derogation, the metaphorical meanings of the female proverbs connote worse qualities than those connoted by the male proverbs.

⁴ See the Afro-Asiatic (Hausa) and Niger Congo (Igbo and Yoruba Languages) language families.

Concept and Culture

Language is a component of human culture; a vehicle of communication, socialization, economic value, polishing tool, building tool, vehicle for learning, excavating tool, personality development and most importantly, preservation of culture. Hudson (2003) defines culture as ‘the kind of knowledge which we learn from other people, either by direct instruction or by watching their behaviour’, thus equating culture to shared knowledge. Apart from transmitting culture from one generation to another, we create and re-create culture using language. New experiences and innovations become part of one’s culture, and these are categorised and expressed using language. In a situation where a given language is lost, some knowledge of the world is lost as well. Culture is one way of identifying groups of people who share common characteristics such as language, social practices, experiences, attitudes and values. People sometimes are not aware of their culture until they come in contact with someone who exhibits different cultural elements such as hand gestures, behaviours and language experiences which are based on the conceptual system of language users.

In essence, the language of a speaker is structured based on the speaker’s cultural experiences – their interaction with the physical environment. Every experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presupposition (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003:57). This gives a basis to Lyons’ (1977:177) and Strawson’s (1950) pragmatic view on reference as opposed to de Saussure’s notion of signifier and signified, where they view reference as an action of the speaker, not that of the expression. The appropriacy of the expression used by the speakers depends on the speakers’ linguistic cultural background as well as their language experiences which structure their conceptual system. This invariably affirms that speakers’ conceptual system differs since their cultural backgrounds and experiences differ, and as a result different conceptualisation of concepts and conceptual mappings among people are realised.

Language and Thought

Cognitive linguists hold the view that language cannot be separated from general thinking. In essence, language and thought interact in significant ways. Thus, each language has its own influence on the thoughts and actions of its speakers. Some linguists, in comparing languages, pay attention to those aspects that are universal to all languages (Language Universals) and formulate theories (Sims and Haspelmath, 2010:8) to describe and explain human language and human language behaviour. Similarly, a group of linguists study Language ‘Particulars’ with special focus on the ways an individual language is special, thereby affirming that language is specie-specific. This idea proposes that language influences thinking, and by extension, cultures. It implies that language is based on cognitive abilities which allow learning and reasoning (Saeed, 2003). This view is widely supported by a good number of cognitive linguists such as Fauconnier and Turner (1998), Gentner (1983), Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003), Glucksberg and Keysar (1993) and Lakoff (1987).

In the area of thinking, image schemas are created based on the linguistic and cultural experiences of language speakers, and these created schemas are linguistically translated through sense reference thus, producing language which is metaphorically structured (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980/2003:56). Conceptual metaphor, a cognitive tool, which enables language speakers to generate new meaning and achieve new sense from old, fosters understanding of one domain by making reference to another. These created image schemas serve as grounding (Saeed, 2003; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980/2003:57), thus generating the intended meaning in the mind of the audience. It is important to note that metaphors are typically literally false but can provide valuable insights. To explain this, we should know that expressions surely must have a deep, as well as a surface level. It is at the surface level that we recognize the falsehood of metaphor. Considering this example, “*Richard is a gorilla*” Kripke (1980) explains that this sentence is not literally true because Richard is not and not necessarily a gorilla. His answer is that the words have more complex structure and this structure is revealed by the possibility of metaphorical use. Expressions may have a primary sense, and thereby generate a new extension for the expression. These ideas and associations show that in addition to a primary sense and reference, there are also an additional associations and meanings. When the primary meaning is deactivated because of the falsehood of the sentence, a switching happens and the secondary meanings latent in the expression are activated.

Another interesting fact is that as soon as we apprehend that an expression is literally false, which usually happens immediately and unconsciously, the expression becomes semantically charged with secondary meaning latent in the associated semantics of the expression. To describe someone as ‘donkey’ in one culture suggests that he is strong and active. Nevertheless, the listener’s background knowledge about the concept used in comparison is very important since this contributes to the interpretation of the target concept. This for instance, differs where another culture interprets ‘donkey’ as stupid and by no means active.

Therefore what is important for the effectiveness of the metaphor is not what is true of the concept, but the associated conceptions or misconceptions about the concept.

Animals and Meaning

Since language cannot be separated from thought, it therefore holds that all language speakers are led by their conceptualisations which are influenced by their experiences. These conceptualised models are used in everyday language to talk about abstract ideas, thereby allowing the language speakers refer to one domain using their experience from another domain; where the two domains do not share any previous relationship. These experiences are culture-specific although some are universals. Different animals have different natural instincts and life styles. During the long-term intimate contact with the animals, people developed a deep-rooted understanding towards animals (Yan-hua, 2010:2). This understanding tends to be similar, but to some extent differ among cultures. However, the meaning an animal connotes depends on a number of factors.

One of these factors shows that different kinds of animals are found in various geographical locations such that people who are physically close to these animals tend to experience them better than those who are farther away from the animals. This physical proximity leads the people around to understand the nature and the behavioural patterns of the animal in addition to its physical qualities. For instance, people from South Africa, Namibia and Ethiopia are likely to create a conceptual meaning of zebra than people in Nigeria and Ghana. Secondly, apart from the natural location of animals, some cultures keep specific animals for different cultural purposes such as religious, occupational and other social reasons. Camel, donkey, horse and sheep, for example, are found in many homes and neighbourhoods in the northern part of Nigeria and they are used for farming, religious sacrifices and sports. These animals are not predominantly found in the eastern Nigeria, as such the animals will have different connotative meaning in both cultures; where the Northern Nigerian culture will have better conceptions and mental models of the animals than the eastern Nigerian culture. Thirdly, apart from the above reasons, people keep animals as pets and for security reasons. This gives them the opportunity to have a better experience about the animals more than others. Finally, some group of persons develop interest in animals. By this means, they study animals irrespective of the animals' geographical location. Consequently, such persons come in contact with some animals which do not exist in their cultures, hence acquiring experiences outside their culture.

Conceptual Framework: Linguistic Relativity

This is also known as Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis which originated from Sapir's (1929) and Whorf's (1956) concept of Linguistic Relativity. According to the theory, the structure of a language affects the speaker's world view. In other words, the linguistic experience of the language speaker determines his conceptualisation of the world, where language represents an element of culture. The theory argues that language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas, but is in itself, a shaper of ideas; it determines our perception of reality. Therefore, analytically, if culture shapes our thought, and where language is an aspect of culture, then our conceptualisation of the world differs as a result of differences in our culture. Sapir (1929) clearly states that "all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar or in some way calibrated". Furthermore, Whorf (1956:214) stressed this relativity between culture and language by comparing language with air:

...We are unaware of the background character of our language, just as we are unaware of the presence of air until we begin to choke... We come to realise that a language does not merely voice ideas, but that it is 'the shaper of ideas', and that we dissect nature along lines laid by our native languages (pp.214).

In essence, the linguistic and cultural experiences of language speakers lead them to making sense of the world around them. Comparing some cultures in Nigeria, for example, one observes that these cultures have different conceptualisations of some real world activities, objects and things. The Yoruba culture for instance has different names for plantain based on the cooking method (agbagba, boli, dodo, ipekere), while Igbo and Hausa have one name each for the fruit. Similarly, Hausa has different names for each of these animals in its locality based on age or gender of the animals such as horse (*doki*), cattle (*Saniya, sa, maraki*) and donkey (*jaki, jaka, aholaki*), whereas Igbo and Yoruba cultures have a single name to represent each group. This affirms some examples cited by social scientists, which show that the Hanunoo has 92 names for rice, the Eskimos have over a hundred names for snow and Hopi has a single name for insect, plane and pilot (Palmer, 1996:45). This theory therefore argues that language plays an important role in shaping reality.

Data Collection

Three major sources are used to obtain data for this research: questionnaires, interviews and written texts. The researcher gave out sixty copies of questionnaires to Nigerians from the three major languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. All the respondents/subjects are literate with at least a Senior Secondary School Certificate. The second source of data is interview. Two persons each from the three major languages were interviewed. The interview was meant to find out (1) whether animal words are used to talk about human qualities and behaviours in their languages, (2) the origin of such expressions, (3) why such expressions are used in their languages and (4) the instances of such expressions in their languages. The subjects for the interviews include language experts and culture activists who are not less than forty-five years old. Finally, the third group of data consists of where animal names were used to describe persons in written texts and corpuses which include magazines, novels, folktales, idioms and proverbs. In analysing the data, the writer examines the meaning(s) given to each animal by one language group and compares it with that of other language groups.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data is presented and analysed in four parts since four categories of data were realised in the study. The first part examined the animal names that share similar connotations among the three Nigerian languages under study, the second part investigated those animal names with distinct conceptual meaning among the three languages, the third part highlighted the animal names which have their connotative meaning shared by two of the three languages, while the fourth identified the animals which do not have any metaphorical associations in the three languages.

Animal Names with Similar Connotations in the Three Languages

The following animal names have the same associative meanings in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages: 'Dog' and 'male goat' make reference to promiscuous or immoral person, while 'female goat' refers to someone who is stubborn. 'Pig' is used to show a dirty person, 'sheep' connotes stupidity and Hausa conceptualises 'sheep' to refer to a highly stupid person. The three languages use 'elephant' to mean greatness, power, prestige and dominance, while lion connotes brevity, strength and signifies a warrior. Other animals that belong to this category identified in the data include 'tortoise' which means crafty or clever person, 'rat' which makes reference to one who is dishonest or one who steals, 'chameleon' describes an inconsistent or unpredictable character, while 'snake' refers to someone who lives a pretentious or deceptive life. Since the Culture and world view of the speakers of these three languages differ in some ways, yet they share some conceptual views, this study has found a gap in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. It therefore provides evidence for linguistic universals (Sims and Haspelmath, 2010) which are shared by languages not withstanding that language is based on experiences and cognitive abilities (Saeed, 2003).

Animal Names with Different Connotations in the Three Languages

In this category, the data reveals that there a number of animal names which have distinct connotative meanings in the three Nigerian languages. In essence, each of the languages has a different conceptualisation of the animal names. This affirms the proposition that the linguistic experience of the language speaker determines his conceptualisation of the world (Sapir, 1956). It therefore shows that each of these cultures have a different world view of the animals found in this category. The animal words and their different connotations are represented in the table below:

Animal word	Hausa Associations	Igbo Associations	Yoruba Associations
Antelope	A fast runner	A beautiful lady with a good body structure	No association
Cat	Lazy, Choosy or Slippery character	A good wrestler whose back does not touch the ground; a quiet and dangerous person	Witchcraft
Housefly	Greedy person	One without a focus	One who constitutes a nuisance to others.
Bedbug	No association	Troublesome person	Poverty
**Owl	One who is not loved; living a solitary life	Someone who has large eyeballs.	Evil, Vigilant person
Bat	A betrayer or a hypocrite	One who cannot make a definite decision.	Blindness: especially psycho-social blindness

Squirrel	No association	Fast or smart person	Crafty person
Camel	One who is hardworking and submissive.	No association	Strong/hardworking person who is stupid because he is used by others for their own purpose.
Cock	An inquisitive person	Proud attitude; a show of manliness	Loyalty

Table 1: Animal Names with Different Connotations in the Three Languages

Table 1 illustrates animal names that have different connotative meaning in the three languages studied. This set of data forms the hub of this study, affirming the theory of Relativism. Nine animals are found in the data to have different and unrelated connotative meanings in the three languages studied. Housefly, bedbug and cock, for example are a common animals in all cultures, yet the peoples have a different conceptual knowledge of the animals. It is certain that behavioural pattern of housefly, bedbug or cock, geographical, religious, climatic or aesthetic factors are not responsible for the differences in the conceptual meaning of the three animals; rather it is affected by the peoples' thought and experience which are tied to their languages.

However, some of the factors mentioned above are likely to affect the connotative meaning of the other animals such as antelope, owl, bat, squirrel and camel. This is because some of these animals are closer to one culture than the others. Camel, for instance, is closer to the Hausa culture than that of Igbo and Yoruba. This leads to varying perceptions of the animal among the three languages. It is important to note that Igbo Language does not have any association for camel. This is because the animal is alien to the culture and their experience does not differentiate camel from donkey. Therefore, it is common to refer to a strong person as "a donkey", and never "a camel".

To extend Relativism, a language may have different names for different related referents yet it has one associative meaning for the referents. When this occurs, one of the referent becomes basic. This study therefore affirms Whorf's instances that languages like the Hanunoo has 92 names for rice and the Eskimos have over a hundred names for snow; however, it proposes that all the distinct names do not necessarily have separate connotative meanings.

Animal Names with the Same Connotations in Two of the Three Languages

As a result of certain experiences shared by the language users, it was noted that out of the three languages under study, two of the languages share some associative meanings of some animals which is different from that of the other language. Some of the reasons for such a common associations of meaning between two languages as against that of the third language is geographical location and influence of religion. As found in the data, Hausa associates 'donkey' to a dull, stupid and unintelligent person, whereas Igbo and Yoruba conceptualises the same animal as strong and hard working person. This difference is as a result of the nearness of donkey to the Hausa speakers, who understand the animal's characteristics more than Yoruba and Igbo speakers who do not have a holistic experience of the animal. Similar factors are the reasons for the different associations represented in this category.

Hausa and Yoruba languages have more similar associative meanings of animal vehicles than Igbo has with either of the languages. This leads to one hypothesis: Hausa and Yoruba language speakers have more similar world view and language experiences in terms of animals than any of the languages has with Igbo language. By implication, Hausa and Yoruba have some common factors in their experience with animals: apart from geographical location, religion plays a strong role in uniting the world view of the two languages; however, occupational and social reasons are some of the enabling factors. The following shows other animals (apart from donkey mentioned above) and their associative meaning used by Yoruba and Hausa speakers and their corresponding connotations used by Igbo speakers:

Animal	Yoruba and Hausa Associative meaning	Igbo Associative meaning
Cow	A senseless person	An obese
Bee	Sweetness; Generosity	Discomfort
Scorpion	Wickedness; Fierce	Troublesome; Nag
Butterfly	Beauty	Weak [Yoruba has this meaning]
Hawk	No association	A thief
Vulture	Dirty character	Bald head
Peacock	Beauty [Yoruba: Royalty]	Pride
Frog	No association	A fat person

A few other animals such as ‘pigeon’, ‘monkey’ and ‘hen’ connote same meaning in two of the languages, and a different meaning in the third language. For example, Yoruba and Igbo do not have any conceptual meaning for ‘pigeon’, while Hausa associates ‘pigeon’ to a trustworthy person. More so, Monkey connotes Ugliness in Hausa and Igbo Languages. In addition, Hausa associates ‘monkey’ to agility, while Igbo uses it to refer to a cunning person. Finally, Yoruba and Igbo associate motherliness and care with ‘hen’, while Hausa associates the same animal name with an unappreciative person. A single reason cannot be given for the conceptual patterns found among the three languages. However, the differences and similarities found are as a result of various factors such as differences and similarities in religion, climate, topography and other sociological factors which enable the cultures to experience the animals in similar or different ways.

Animal Names without Connotations

This study sampled many animals found within and outside Nigeria to find out if language users make sense of the animals found only in their environment, conceptualise any other animal irrespective of their cultural experiences. Among the animals sampled, the study showed that language users do not use all the animals they have come in contact with to describe people and their behaviours. Some examples like lizard, earthworm, gorilla and wasp are not part of the language speakers’ conceptual system. Furthermore, some languages conceptualise a given animal name, while others do not create any associative meaning of the same animal. For instance, while Hausa and Igbo have meaning for Antelope, Yoruba does not. Similarly, Igbo does not have any meaning for ‘camel’ whereas Hausa and Yoruba do.

Discussion

The data revealed that language users, irrespective of culture, ethnicity, religion, educational or geographical background conceptualise animal terms and link them to human behaviours, attitudes or qualities. This study disclosed that a number of animals (*dog, pig, male goat, lion, elephant, chameleon, rat, tortoise and snake*) have a common connotative meaning among the three languages which do not belong to the same language family. This is not a weakness in the Sapir-Whorf’s hypothesis, which claims that “if culture shapes our thought, and where language is an aspect of culture, then conceptualisation of the world differs as a result of differences in culture” (Sapir, 1929) and “that we dissect nature along lines laid by our native languages” (Whorf, 1956). However, other contacts such as religion, trade and education play a very important role in uniting the thoughts and experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds. The data showed that Hausa and Yoruba have more similar conceptual meanings of animal words than Igbo has with any of the two languages. This confirms that although these languages have different cultural backgrounds, they still have common connotations of the same concept. In essence, although Igbo and Yoruba belong to the same Kwa, Niger Congo Family, they share less meaning than Yoruba has with Hausa, which belongs to Afro-Asiatic Family.

One major reason for this similarity is the influence of religion. Religion, the main component of human culture, affects people’s attitudes towards accepting or rejecting a given experience, an animal in this case. There are more Hausa and Yoruba Muslims than Igbo Muslims in Nigeria, and as a result, the two cultures share more experiences and thoughts than Igbo does with Hausa and Yoruba. In the course of this religious practice, both cultures move to a locations where they share the same experiences. Since animals are friends of man, they are bound to experience the instincts of these animals and talk about it. Another reason for finding conceptual similarity in different cultures is the influence of convention. Due to different living conventions, different cultures have different aesthetic standards and values for concepts. For instance, in English, the animal word “owl” is considered as wise, and it portrays good value. However, in the three Nigerian languages, it has a negative value, although in varying ways. People have a long tradition of keeping pets, and the type of animal they keep is influenced by the people’s (social) values and aesthetic standards. Because of occupational and other social and aesthetic reasons, Hausas, for example, keep value pets like donkey, camel and horse, while Yoruba and Igbo do not always keep such pets. Similarly, cats are found more in the homes of Hausa and Igbo natives than in the homes of Yoruba natives. As a result of this convention, Hausa and Igbo, for example are likely to share a closer conceptual meaning of cat which will be different from what it connotes to a Yoruba speaker.

Finally, the difference in the conceptualisation of animal words is mainly influenced by proverbs and idioms. Proverbs and Idioms are usually closely related to distinctive cultural fables and mythologies. The meanings evoked by these sayings influence the conceptual system of the languages speakers. Some of

these idioms, proverbs, historical literature, ancient fables and fairy tales differ from culture to culture, and they often use animal names to address peoples' behaviours, qualities and attitudes. The meaning of each of the idioms or proverbs that contain animal words induce a distinct meaning in that language, which is not likely to have the same meaning with another language.

Conclusion

This paper analyses the cultural connotations of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba animal names, and compares the animal's cultural connotations found among the three languages. We have learned that animal names have their own features and cultural connotations in different languages. Animal names have formed a conceptual tool which helps in talking about abstract events, characteristics and experiences. Since people exhibit different characters, behaviours and attitudes which are difficult to describe using denotative language, animal terms are conceptualised based on people's experiences of the animals, as well as some language experiences. Although culture shapes language, this study has shown that different cultures also share similar thoughts as a result of their contact with similar world of experience in their different locations. As an important element in forming idiom, animal word plays a distinctive role and has rich expressiveness. Because of different values and aesthetic standards, geographical circumstances, religions and conventions among the three Nigerian languages, the implied meanings of a particular animal are possibly different. Also, it affirms that language and thought are inseparable; language users conceptualise animals with features similar to that of human, as such those animals that do not exhibit similar behaviours found in human are not associated with any behaviour. More so, these languages did not make reference to most animals such as dolphin, shark, porcupine, zebra, gorilla or buffalo that are not part of their experiences. Finally, it was also noted that no aspect of language teaches speakers to create relationships between two unrelated concepts – human behaviours and animal characters, yet all language speakers consciously or unconsciously create this schema in their thought using language.

Works cited

- Anjomshoa, L. and Sadighi, F. (2015). The Comparison of Connotative Meaning in Animal Words between English and Persian Expressions and their Translation. In *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)* Volume 3, Issue 2, February 2015, PP 65-77.
- Arunachalam, S. and Waxman, S. R. (2010). 'Specifying the Role of Linguistic Information in Verb Learning'. In K. Franich, K. Iserman, and L. Kiel (Eds.) *Proceedings of the 34th Annual Boston Conference on Language Development*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.
- Budson, M. D. and Price, M. D. (2005). *Memory Dysfunction*. New England Journal of Medicine, 352,629-699.
- Davies, E. E. and Bentahila, A., (1989). Familiar & Less Familiar Metaphors. *Language & communication* 9, 49-68.
- Eggins, S. (2004). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. 2nd Ed. Continuum.
- Estaji, A. & Nakhavali. F. (2011). Semantic Derogation in Persian Animal Proverbs. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 9, pp. 1213-1217. ACADEMY PUBLISHER
- Estaji, A. & Nakhavali. F. (2011). Contrastive Analysis of Dog Expression in English and Persian. In *American Society for Engineering Education*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 13-21.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (1998). Conceptual Integration Networks. In *Cognitive Science*, pp. 133-187.
- Fraser, B. (1981). Insulting Problems in a Second Language. *TESOL Quarterly* 15, 435-441.
- Gentner, D. (1983). Structure-mapping: A theoretical framework for analogy. *Cognitive Science*, 7, pp. 155-170.
- Glucksberg, S., and Keysar, B. (1993). How metaphors work. In Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*, pp. 401-424, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Arnold.
- Haspelmath. M. and Sims, A. (2010). *Understanding Morphology*. London: Hodder Education
- Hsieh, S. Y. (2006). A Corpus – Based Study on Animal Expressions in Mandarin Chinese and German. *Journal of pragmatics* 38, 2206-2222.
- Hsieh, S. Y. (2008). "Cognitive Models of Using Animal and Plant Metaphors" NCKU FLLD Monograph Series Vol.1. *Languages across Cultures*. National Cheng kung University.
- Hudson, R. A. (2003). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kovecses, Z. (2000). *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kripke, S. (1980). *Naming and Necessity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1993). The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor. In Orthony, (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought* (2nd edition) pp. 202 -251, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago press.

- Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics*. (2 vols.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nadim, M. (2000). The Role of Animals in Shirazi Proverbs with Sociolinguistic Approach. *First Publishers First Volume*, Daneshgah publication.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *Approaches to Translation*. Prentice Hall, Hemel Hempstead
- Palmer, F. R. (1996). *Semantics, second edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Saeed, J. I. (2003). *Semantics, second edition*. India: Blackwell.
- Sapir, E. (1929). 'The Status of Linguistics as a Science', *Language* 5, 207-14.
- Strawson, P. F. (1950). 'On Referring'. *Mind, New Series*, Vol. 59:235, pp. 320-344.
- Tomita, S. (2000). "Rhetorical Expressions by Simile in David Copperfield". [www.dickens.jp>archive>dc-tomita](http://www.dickens.jp/archive/dc-tomita). Retrieved 3rd September, 2016.
- Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. J. B. Carroll. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Yan-hua, T. (2010). 'A Study on Cultural Connotations between Chinese and English Animal Words', *Studies in Literature and Language* Vol. 1, No. 4, 2010, pp. 62-69